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SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF PRESIDENT McKINLEY AND THE CUBAN INTERVENTION.

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GOING over old letter-files is like digging in old ash-heaps—one must uncover an enormous mass of rubbish to recover even a modest prize. Most men in administrative places leave their literary accumulations to be cast into the pit by their successors. Now and then a fire or a removal forces one to sift over and reassert his own literary scrap-pile. It was in the process made necessary by the second of these calamities that I ran across, some months ago, a memorandum dated May 2nd, 1899, which contained in my own handwriting an interesting explanation I had heard President McKinley make that night concerning his own attitude toward the questions which arose through the Cuban difficulties and the war with Spain. The story of how the paper came to be written is this:

In the autumn of 1897 I had been appointed by President McKinley, upon the recommendation of Secretary Gage, Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, a scientific bureau of the Government organized nearly a hundred years ago. I had never met the President until after my appointment, and I had, of course, no reason to anticipate, as a bureau chief, any other acquaintance with him than the limited official one which my duties might involve. The accident of the Spanish War furnished the unexpected occasion for a somewhat closer personal relation.

After Admiral Dewey left Hongkong for Manila, I had followed his movements on one of the British Admiralty charts. In the first messages received from the scene of action appeared the

words "Subig Bay," "Corregidor Island," "Cavite" and other names which were strange enough to our ears then, but now have the ring of household words. A glance at the chart on the morning of May 2nd showed their relative positions, and made so intelligible the telegraphic account of the battle that I wondered whether the President had any satisfactory map of the region. Having occasion during the morning to visit the State Department, in connection with the preparation of material relating to the Alaska boundary dispute, I rolled up the chart I had been using, stopped at the White House, and handed it to Mr. Porter, then Secretary to the President. Mr. Porter expressed great surprise at the existence of such a chart, and said it contained exactly the sort of information which was greatly desired. He added that the President was alone, and he suggested that I go in with him at once and take the chart to the President.

We found the President alone—an unusual thing at that time and for that hour of the day. Preliminary messages had been received from Admiral Dewey the evening before, announcing the victory of May 1st, and the President was at the moment engaged in reading the complete despatches, which were being sent from the Navy Department in sections as fast as they were translated out of the cipher. He was using a small map of the Philippine Islands about as long as one's hand, apparently taken from a school geography. (This was the day when, as Mr. Dooley remarked, Few of us knew whether the Philippines were islands or canned goods.) On this small map, Manila Bay was no larger than a pea, and none of the details of the shore line and local topography could be made out. The moment that the Admiralty chart was spread out, showing the great sweep of Manila Bay, with its comparatively narrow entrance, the messages the President was reading could forthwith be understood. We spent a half hour reading these messages, ending with the final description of the complete destruction of the Spanish fleet, and leaving us all aglow with national feeling. It was an interesting moment to spend with the President of the United States.

As I rose to go the President stopped me. "I think," said he, "I have a job for you, and, if you will come with me, I would like to show you what it is." Leading the way across the reception-room, he took me to the small room in the southeast corner occupied by the telegraph department, of which Colonel Mont-

gomery was chief. "It is evident," said the President, "that I must learn a deal of geography in this war, and I am going to turn over to you the task of furnishing me the necessary maps and charts. These walls will be at your disposal, and I shall feel greatly indebted if you will see that there are placed here such maps and charts as will be of assistance to me in the questions which are sure to arise in the course of the war now upon us. I will see that your men are given admission here, at any time, to place upon the walls such maps as you think necessary."

The task thus committed to me was one of the most interesting one could undertake. The Coast Survey has in its service some of the most skilled cartographers in the world. We ransacked every source for such maps of the Philippines, of the West Indies, and of other countries concerning which information was desired. When a map of the proper size and with the proper information upon it could not be had, maps were prepared in the office of the Coast Survey. On one or two occasions, these maps were prepared on a large scale in the course of a single night's work. There was placed upon them the information which showed cable lines, coaling stations and other matters germane to the study to which they would be subjected.

It was my habit to visit this room, which came after a while to be called the "map-room," once or twice a week, to see how the work was being carried out. Occasionally, on these visits, I met the President, who was always friendly and considerate, and always most appreciative of any effort to help him. He was a man who gave his confidence rather slowly but very completely, and in the course of the year I came to entertain toward him a gradually increasing feeling of friendship and intimacy; for the map-making was continued for the different provinces of the Philippines long after the Spanish War had ended.

It was in virtue of the acquaintance thus made that I occasionally called at the White House in the evening in response to his invitation. On the 2nd of May, 1899, a Sunday evening, I happened to make such a call, and found the President and Mrs. McKinley engaged in a game of cribbage. Mrs. McKinley soon retired, and the President lit a cigar and began to talk. I reminded him that just a year ago that day I had brought to him a map of Manila Bay and its environs. The remark awoke in him a series of reminiscences of the past year, and he began to

speaking, first, in a somewhat casual way, but later with great earnestness, concerning the events of the year and his own part in them. As he went on, his earnestness grew; and at the last he spoke with some emotion, saying that what he had done had been in the most sincere desire to serve the interests of the country and of humanity; that the things which he had done he had considered with great care; that he had not only thought over them, but prayed over them; and that he could only hope that the outcome would be justified. The conversation seemed so unusual an one that, after leaving him, I wrote down, as nearly as I could remember, the salient points of his talk, and it was this paper which turned up in my removal of some months ago, to bring back the memories of the man and of the occasion.

President McKinley began by saying that he could scarcely realize that a full year had passed since the morning to which I alluded—a year which, he said, had been crowded full of momentous events altogether different from those with which he had expected to deal when he came to the Presidency. He had found himself compelled to face, at the beginning of his administration, a series of questions wholly outside the range of those which ordinarily came to a President of the United States.

The matter of which the President spoke with most feeling was his conviction that, if he had been left alone, he could have concluded an arrangement with the Spanish Government under which the Spanish troops would have withdrawn from Cuba without a war. Of this he spoke with great frankness, stating most explicitly his conviction that, but for the inflamed state of public opinion and the fact that Congress could no longer be held in check, a peaceful solution might have been had.

Of the consequences which the war brought he spoke with less certainty, but with great earnestness. As the war advanced and the question of the possible addition of new territory came up, the President stated that he had at first felt opposed to the addition of any of the outlying territory to our possessions. He had felt at the beginning doubtful even about Hawaii and Porto Rico, but as time went on and the alternatives had to be faced which the rejection of these countries would involve, he had felt compelled to take Hawaii and Porto Rico as the least dangerous experiment. As to the Philippines, he stated that at the beginning he had felt entirely opposed to the retention of any part

of these islands; but here again the difficulties of the alternative had gradually influenced him. He had desired at first to retain a coaling station; then all of Manila Bay; then all of Luzon; and, finally, he had come to the decision that the occupancy of the entire island group was, under the circumstances, the wisest course for his Government to pursue.

Just what the reasons were which gradually led President McKinley to change his opinion were not made clear in his talk, notwithstanding the earnestness with which he spoke of his convictions; but it was clear from the references which he made that two influences had profoundly affected him: first, the belief that this policy was the wish of the American people; and, second, the conviction that our government of the Philippines would be a sort of national missionary effort, which would result in great good to the people of those islands and exert a most salutary effect on our own politics.

The President spoke with more earnestness and with more definiteness as to his regret for the war itself than as to the complications which arose from it. There could be no question of his firm belief that, if left alone, he could have settled the matter without a war. The situation in Congress finally came to a point where, in his opinion, it was impossible for him to stop the war current. What the causes were which led up to this condition he did not indicate with great definiteness, otherwise than to mention incidentally the incessant newspaper agitation, the emotionalism of certain members of the House and of the Senate, and the stampeding of Congress under the impression that the country was demanding immediate hostilities. Whether this spirit could have been dealt with successfully by a man made of sterner stuff than President McKinley, it would be difficult at this time to say. Perhaps few people realize the excited state of feeling in which men in public life lived during the first months of 1898. One who turns back to the files of the daily press of those days and reads the frantic appeals which were poured out, will understand in what a ferment the public mind must have been to accept such expressions of prejudice and passion. One appreciates also, at this distance in time, the success with which the accusation of low motives was pressed against those who stood resolutely for a peaceful solution of our differences with Spain.

In 1898 the most powerful offices under our Government—the Presidency and the Speakership of the House—were filled by William McKinley and Thomas B. Reed. These two men were not in sympathy with each other politically or personally; but in the belief that war was unnecessary they were thoroughly agreed, and all the influence which went with their great places was thrown into the effort to stem the current setting for war.

I remember a scene in the Speaker's office just before the outbreak of war, which illustrated not only his attitude in this matter, but the quickness of his wit. I had gone to his office at his request in relation to certain matters connected with the business of the Coast Survey. As we sat talking, a Southern member of Congress burst into the room, his face aflame with excitement, a newspaper in his hand. Planting the paper on the table before the Speaker, he demanded in an excited voice whether a civilized nation would permit such things as were there described within ninety miles of its borders. Slowly adjusting his glasses, the Speaker cast his eye over the paper. At the top, in large head-lines, was a story of the sufferings of the reconcentrados. But about half-way down the page, in smaller lines, was an account of an assault on a negro postmaster in one of the Southern States. Instead of reading the top lines, the Speaker read in his drawling voice the lower set of head-lines: "The Postmaster at Blank Shot — His Wife Ill-treated — His House Burned." "Why, my friend," said he, in the same drawling tone, "that can't be down South; that must be over in Cuba. If we had a civilization like that we wouldn't want to spread it over Cuba anyhow, would we?" By that time the would-be savior of Cuba was well on his way out of the room.

To the end of his life Mr. Reed could not refer to those days without emotion, and he believed, whether rightly or not, that if a calm presentation of the facts could have been had, peaceful means would have accomplished the ends which this nation sought. However that may be, no thoughtful man could observe the interaction among an irresponsible press, emotional politicians and an excited public without alarm, and without realizing, whatever his attitude to the Cuban question, the dangers of such a situation and the difficulty of securing the essential facts for calm action.

Just why everybody was ready to fight except a few men, like

Mr. McKinley and Mr. Reed, was not exactly clear. There was a propaganda for war, fed by newspapers primarily, assisted by a few politicians, and eventually becoming a matter of party rivalry. At the last, it became a race to see who could push the nation into war soonest.

There is one sad ghost of the days of 1898 which I wish might be decently laid. When the American enters Havana Harbor the bones of the "Maine," gaunt and bare, are almost the first object to meet his eye. The wreck lies at the edge of the fairway, a daily menace to navigation. When the visitor inquires why it has not been removed, he is told that the port officials would have long ago removed it, but fear to throw an unwelcome light on a question already decided. It is better, they say, to let sleeping dogs lie.

It is extremely improbable that the removal of the "Maine's" wreckage would throw any light on the question of its destruction. But, whether it did or not, the nation which was strong enough and unselfish enough to go to war to end what was believed to be an intolerable situation is strong enough to have the truth known. The sight of this ill-fated hulk rising above the waters of the harbor, pathetic as it is to an American, is a source of constant irritation to many of the inhabitants of Cuba; and the failure to remove it is naturally looked upon as a weakness. The postal-card venders reap a rich harvest from it, recalling in a very literal way Quay's words about making merchandise of the "Maine's" dead. Its complete removal would not only be in the interest of navigation, but would banish from the public gaze a reminder of a bitter episode which is best forgot.

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